

Appendix B

YOUNG ADDITION
CALF CREEK WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA
FEE TITLE DONATION
SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS

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I. INTRODUCTION

House Bill 526, passed by the 1987 Legislature (MCA 87-1-241 and MCA 87-1-242), authorizes Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) to acquire an interest in land for the purpose of protecting and improving wildlife habitat. These acquisitions can be through fee title, conservation easements, or leasing. In 1989, the Montana legislature passed House Bill 720 requiring that a socioeconomic assessment be completed when wildlife habitat is acquired using Habitat Montana monies. These assessments evaluate the significant social and economic impacts of the acquisition on local governments and local businesses.

This socioeconomic evaluation addresses the fee title donation of property to FWP from Ms Christopher Young. The report addresses the physical and institutional setting as well as the social and economic impacts associated with the proposed fee title donation.

II. PHYSICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL SETTING

A. Property Description

Calf Creek WMA and the subject 68 acres lie approximately 6 miles east of Hamilton, at the end of Hamilton Heights Road, in Ravalli County, Montana. The proposed 68-acre addition shares almost ½-mile of common boundary with the WMA, and would add a ¼-mile buffer from adjoining developed and further developable private lands. This donation is offered by Ms Christopher Young, the owner of the subject parcel, with the intent that the gift be accomplished by the end of 2011. For a detailed property description see the Environmental Assessment.

B. Habitat and Wildlife Populations

The 68-acre parcel is an extension of the shrub-grassland habitat of the adjacent Calf Creek WMA, and it is practically nonforested. The property is gently sloping and generally southwest-facing. Vegetation is comprised of native and non-native species, including bluebunch wheatgrass, junegrass, bluegrasses, big sagebrush, rubber rabbitbrush, and spotted knapweed. Dry coulees support scattered ponderosa pine, chokecherry and serviceberry.

Calf Creek WMA is winter range for about 200 elk that occasionally use the proposed 68-acre addition, particularly in hard winters. White-tailed deer occur year-round. Black bear, cougar and coyote round out the common occurrences of large mammals. Game birds include ruffed grouse, dusky grouse, and occasionally Hungarian partridge. Species documented on or near the parcel, or likely to be found there include western meadowlark, vesper sparrow, savannah sparrow, mountain bluebird, Wilson's snipe, gray partridge, and eastern kingbird. Raptor species documented in the area include golden eagle, American kestrel, and red-tailed hawk.

The parcel provides habitat that may support several species of concern. Western skink and Preble's shrew have been documented in similar habitat nearby on the Calf Creek WMA. Other species of concern or potential species of concern that use similar habitat in the Bitterroot Valley include grasshopper sparrow, Brewer's sparrow, common poorwill, and Idaho pocket gopher.

C. Current Use

The private landowner has occasionally pastured livestock on the property. The 68-acre addition contains the primary administrative access road to the WMA, which is gated and locked. Public access to the property has been at the discretion of the private landowner. Aside from the road, power, telephone, and a water well, there are no other improvements on the property, and it is practically nonforested.

D. Purchase Alternatives

- 1) Accept the donation of property fee title
- 2) No fee title accepted

FWP Fee Title Donation: FWP would add the 68-acre donation to Calf Creek WMA and manage it as it currently manages the rest of the WMA. Public access would be nonmotorized, and open from April 15th through December 1st. Calf Creek WMA is closed to all public access from December 2nd through April 14th to provide elk undisturbed access to their winter range.

No Purchase Alternative: The no purchase alternative requires some assumptions since use and management of the property would vary depending on what the may do with the property if FWP does not accept its donation. A very real possibility is the sale of the property to a private entity that may not choose to protect the wildlife and fisheries habitat nor provide for public access.

III. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS

The fee title donation of the 68 acres of land to FWP would provide long-term protection of important wildlife habitat and provide for public access to the land. This section describes the social and economic impacts of the fee title donation.

The financial impacts address the cost of the fee title donation to FWP and discuss the impacts on tax revenues to local government agencies.

The recreational activities that would occur on and adjacent to the property as well as the maintenance work on the property would provide information on the impacts the donation may have on local businesses.

A. Financial Impacts

FWP proposes to accept the fee-title as a donation from the private landowner. Therefore, FWP would not incur a purchase cost for acquiring this property.

FWP is also required to establish a maintenance account for property acquisitions (87-1-209 and 23-1-127 (2) MCA). Such an account would be used to for weed maintenance, fence installation or repair of existing fences, garbage removal, implementation of safety and health measures required by law to protect public, erosion control, streambank stabilization, erection of barriers to preserve riparian vegetation and habitat, and planting of native trees, grasses, and shrubs for

habitat stabilization. Such maintenance activities should be consistent with the Good Neighbor policy. In the case of the proposed acceptance of a land donation, the donation would not trigger a deposit of funds into this particular maintenance account. However, funds from this and other FWP funding accounts would be available for the maintenance of this property, as also provided for the existing Calf Creek WMA.

The financial impacts to local governments are the potential changes in tax revenues resulting from the fee title donation to FWP. The transfer of this land to FWP would not change the tax revenues that Ravalli County currently collects on these lands. FWP is required by Montana Statute (87-1-603, MCA) to pay “to the county a sum equal to the amount of taxes which would be payable on county assessment of the property were it taxable to a private citizen.”

B. Economic Impacts

The maintenance and enhancement work that would be needed initially to repair and ultimately replace fencing around this addition to the Calf Creek WMA would generate a minor, short-term, positive economic activity for local businesses. Otherwise, the added maintenance expenditures by FWP would not be realized in the form of new contracts for work, but rather as additional work within contracts and expenditures that already occur to manage the rest of Calf Creek WMA.

While the acquisition of this property may not increase the total number of hunter and other recreation days in this area, the purchase would ensure that these activities continue at their current levels. In addition, the purchase would open opportunities for other recreational activities such as wildlife viewing, mountain biking, etc., which would contribute a minor amount to the economic well-being of local businesses.

IV. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The fee title donation of the 68 acres by Ms Young would provide long-term protection for wildlife habitat adjoining Calf Creek WMA, maintain the open space integrity of the land, and enhance public recreation opportunities.

This purchase would not reduce the tax revenues that Ravalli County collects on this property under Montana Statute (87-1-603, MCA).

The financial impacts to local businesses from this purchase would be small and positive given that recreational opportunities would not be negatively impacted and FWP would be working to address weed issues, road and fence maintenance, as well as fire and timber issues.